PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR: HIS SPIRITUAL LOCUS

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We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be overwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!(1)

I. Background

Discussing Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poems and short stories is perhaps more relevant than discussing his novels because before he began writing novels Dunbar had already established his place in the field of poetry, and moreover, he was accorded nationwide fame for the first time as a black poet. In addition to being a poet and a novelist, Dunbar left four collections of short stories. Generally speaking, his efforts resulted in black poets and novelists more or less avoiding the problem of the place of racial identity in art. It is unnecessary to write about his career in detail because there are already many biographical studies of Dunbar: however, a brief outline of his life will help us appreciate Dunbar all the more.

Paul Laurence Dunbar was born in Dayton, Ohio on June 27, 1872 as a son of ex-slaves, Joshua and Matilda. His parents separated in his early childhood and later divorced. It is said that from the age of seven he began to write poems. In 1884, at the age of twelve, he recited his first original poem, “Easter Hymn,” at the Eaker Street African Episcopal Methodist Church. During his high school(2) he was a member of the literary society as well as its president, and he also served as the editor-in-chief of The High School Times, a monthly student publication. Sometimes he wrote Western dialect stories for the A.N. Kellogg Syndicate and he also composed his class song. After graduating from high school with honors. He was too poor to go to college and had to accept a position as an elevator boy, working for four dollars a week.
The years 1892 and 1893 were memorable in the life of Paul Laurence Dunbar because he was encouraged by a number of men who promised to give him financial support, and as a result, began to prepare for the publication of his first book of poems, Oak and Ivy. Ultimately, however, Dunbar was not able to receive any financial support because his would-be backers merely made fun of him by doing so. He had no money, and besides, the publisher required the payment for publication in advance. Fortunately, with the help of Mr. William Blacker, the business manager of the United Brethren Publishing House, Dunbar’s book was published in time for the Christmas holiday. Within two weeks of its publication, he sold all of the books and was able to repay Mr. Blacker for his time and effort. His poems began to attract public attention and he gained a good reputation. He got a position as a page at the Dayton Court House and then he was employed by Frederic Douglass as a clerk in the Haitian Building World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

After the exposition he returned to Dayton where more financial hardship awaited him. During those difficult days he met Mr. Charles Thatcher, an attorney, and Dr. Henry A. Tobey, who became life-long friends of Dunbar. In 1895, with the help of these two friends, he published his second book of poetry, Major and Minors. Initially he had no success in selling this poetry, but thanks to Dr. Tobey, he had a chance to give it to Mr. James A. Herne, an actor and playwright who introduced him to William Dean Howells, prominent figure in the literary world at that time. Howells reviewed Dunbar’s poems favorably in Harper’s Weekly. In addition, Dr. Tobey sent a copy of Dunbar’s poems to Robert G. Ingersoll, an orator, politician and lawyer who achieved recognition for his criticism of the Bible based on scientific rationalism. Ingersoll was attracted by Dunbar’s poems and later secured a position for him in the Congressional Library at Washington, D.C. Especially with Howell’s influential sponsorship, the sensitive young poet was assured of a successful career.

In spite of hardships, Dunbar went to England for a public entertainer with the daughter of his former New York manager, Major Pond. Before he sailed for England he got engaged to Alice Ruth Moore, an English teacher from New Orleans. The tour of England was not so pleasant because his manager soon deserted him, but, with the help of John Han, U.S. Ambassador to England, he was able to recite his poems before a number of men and women of London and write poems.

In 1897 he returned to New York from London, and with the assistance of Ingersoll, was appointed the position of assistant in the Reading Room of the Library of Congress. Around this time, however, he was very busy writing numerous poems and magazine articles, so he resigned the position on December 31, 1898 to devote full time to his literary work. On March 6 he married Alice Ruth Moore and in the same year he published his first novel The Uncalled in England. In February 1899, Dunbar went to Tuskegee Institute of Booker T. Washington and gave a reading and a number of lectures on English Composition. In March he went to Boston with Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois on behalf of Tuskegee Institute to recite his poem at Hollis Street Theater. Atlanta University conferred an honorary Master of Arts degree on him, and in the same year he published Poem of Cabin and Field, dedicated to Bishop Henry C. Potter who befriended him during an illness. While en route to Boston, he fell ill with pneumonia and it was then that his tuberculosis was detected.
In spite of illness-related hardships, during four years, from 1898 to 1902, he was very busy writing essays, stories, articles, speeches, novels and poems as well as reciting. As a result of his weakened condition, he had to travel from New York to Colorado for treatment. In 1900 he published his second novel, *The Love of Laudy*, and a one act play in collaboration with Will Marion Cook. In 1901 he published his third novel, *The Fanatics*, and then *Roly Poly, Li'l Gal* and *Candle-Lightin' Time*. In 1902 he separated from his wife with their mutual consent. His fourth and last novel, *The Sport of the Gods*, was published in May 1901 (it had previous appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine*). From 1903 to 1904 his health rapidly deteriorated and he seemed to have lost the fight to regain it. However, until his death, he continued to publish a considerable amount of poetry: *Lyrics of Love and Laughter*, *When Malindy Sings*, and *In Old Plantation Days* in 1903; and *The Heart of Happy Hollow* in 1904; *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow*, *Howdy, Honey, Howdy* in 1905; and *Joggin' Erlong* in 1906. Six months before his death, his best friend, Dr. William Burns, died. His death grieved Dunbar deeply. In February 1906 he died in his home at 219 North Summit Street, Dayton, Ohio.

On the afternoon of February 12 at the Eaker Street A.M.E. Church in Dayton his funeral service was held. Many flowers were sent and eloquent tributes were paid Paul Laurence Dunbar by many persons, among them, the moving addresses of Dr. Tobey, William Dean Howells and Robert G. Ingersoll. Lida Keck Wiggins described the scene of his burial service:

> The remains of Paul Laurence Dunbar were placed in the vault at the beautiful Woodland Cemetery in Dayton, and two months later, he was buried. The side of his grave is well chosen, being at the summit of a little hill, and in selecting it his mother endeavored to follow as nearly as might be, the wishes voiced by her son in his "Death Song." She will plant a willow near the mound, so that by and by he will be lying "neaf de willers in de grass." He is near also to "de noises in de road," for the grave is in view of one of the entrances to the cemetery . . . . (4)

II. *The Uncalled*

*The Uncalled* is not a story about blacks or mulattos like the previous novelists, but rather, about whites. One winter's morning, Mrs. Margaret Bret, whose husband has disappeared from home, is found dead in a shabby room at the end of a short, dirty street in the meanest part of the small Ohio town of Dextor. Her neighbors gossip about her five-years-old son Frederick, and by agreement, Miss Hester Prime takes charge of him. She is almost forty years old and throughout her life she has sacrificed everything to duty, whether it is the yearning of her own heart or the feelings of those who loved her. Her existence is governed by rigid rules from which she never deviates. In the beginning, she doesn't know how to raise Frederick but she does know that she wants him to be a minister, that is, one of the "called." Under her stoic influence he feels disconsolate stiffness. For Freddie, Mr. Eliphant Hodges, Rev. Simpson's assistant, Hester's old friend and one-time lover, is his only relief. Mr. Hodges gives Freddie spiritual guidance.

When he is seventeen years old Freddie falls in love with his classmate Elizabeth, the daughter of Rev. Simpson. Soon after graduation, at a picnic of the graduating class, Elizabeth falls into a
river and nearly drowns. Bravely, Freddie jumps into the river to save her. From that time on their feelings toward each other deepen and Mr. Hodges, Freddie’s guardian, becomes aware of Freddie’s love for Elizabeth. Because Freddie feels guilty about loving a girl Hodges encourages him by telling him how he loved a woman almost thirty years ago and revealing that he is still waiting for her. The woman is Miss Hester. Soon after, Mr. Hodges confesses his love to Miss Hester and, finally they are united.

Following Hester’s advice Freddie tries to become a preacher. When he tells Elizabeth that “Aunt Hester wants me to be a preacher,” Elizabeth says that “I am so glad to hear that”... “I think you’ll make a good one.” These words anger him because he finds some kind of thoughtlessness or misunderstanding, when he recalls that Hester spoke to him in the same tone. Although still undecided whether to become a preacher or not, he goes to Bible Seminary and there he finds some kind of pleasure. He succeeds at school against his will and his oratorical power gradually comes to be recognized. A few years later, Freddie and Elizabeth meet again and at this time they confirm their love.

When Riv. Simpson decides to resign his position, Freddie is tested to see if he has the prowess of a preacher. He makes an excellent sermon in front of the congregation under severe circumstances. After that he is confronted again with his inner struggle of whether or not to become a preacher. The profession has become so distasteful to him that on the ordination day he deliberately tries to fail in his answers to the examining committee; however, he answers their questions perfectly. Thus, he is appointed to the position of preacher at Dexter. During the ceremony he collapses from pressure, and making an excuse of illness, he avoids seeing anyone, even his sweetheart with whom he is to marry around the end of his first year as a pastor.

Meanwhile prejudice against him in the town grows because he is the son of old drunkard Tom Brent. Even his fiancee’s father, an ex-paster, burdens him with a lot of advice. So day by day, the bitterness he feels against his father grows to the point which he can not suppress. One day Mr. Simpson enters Freddie’s chamber and says, “you have a great chance, dear Brother Brent, forgiving the devil in this particular part of the moral vineyard a hard blow... I came to advise you to hold Sophy Davis up in church next Sunday as a fearful example of evil doing.”(5) (To tell the truth, there is nothing with her except a rumor that she made eyes at her young fellow-sales-man, though she was older than he.) With conviction based on the Bible, he refuses, thereby inciting Mr. Simpson to gather the top member of the congregation together to press him to resign from the position.

After the affair he leaves Dexter and goes to Cincinnati. There he finds himself in a most peculiar situation, one that deviates from the old Puritan code. He begins to think that Aunt Hester was, after all, in the right and that her way was best. One day when he is out sight-seeing with a friend from the boarding hotel a temperance meeting attracts his attention. Among the speakers is his father who is miserable condition, receiving contributions from the audience. From that time on this memory of his father haunts him day and night. He even confines himself in his room because he can’t forgive his father’s disgraceful deed. Soon after he receives a letter from Dexter summoning him home and the next morning he receives a telegram from Eliphant Hodges saying “Come at once. You are needed.” As he knows the real meaning behind the telegram, he hesitates to go back. At last he does return. When he first sees his father he can’t say anything;
however, after a long struggle he manages to forgive him. His father dies in peace and he returns to Cincinnati where he finds another sweetheart. He changes his religion from the Methodist faith to the Congregational faith. From that time on he lives more like a normal man of his age now than ever did before.

As Vernon Loggins and Hugh M. Gloster pointed out, *The Uncalled*, written in England, is said to be Dunbar's spiritual autobiography. This is probably because the hero's psychological depiction is more detailed compared with that previous novels and because Dunbar himself once thought of becoming a minister.

In spite of his efforts to stay in the mainstream of black literature, Dunbar's novel strayed from the course established by William Wells Brown. Specifically, Dunbar tinged his white hero with his own inner struggle but did not give him a black identity. As a result, from the viewpoint of black literature, he omitted the important problem of black identity although he meritoriously avoided the stereotype as a bad tradition of the black novel. In this novel he only makes the following comment about blacks:

A quartet of young negroes were singing on the pavement in front of a house as he passed and catching the few pennies and nickels that were flung to them from the door.(6)

About this masquerade, Addison Gayle, Jr. in "Literature as Catharsis: the Novels of Paul Laurence Dunbar," points out that:

Far from dissuading Dunbar from other such ventures, however, the preference of him to seek to negate his identity all the more.(7)

William Dean Howells also influenced Dunbar's decision to portray white characters in his novel. Of course, Howells' sponsorship was a important in enabling Dunbar receive national acclaim; however, it also become a sanction on Dunbar's literary creation. Ultimately, it was Dunbar himself who imposed sanction on his poems, short stories and novels because they were the mean of his livelihood. Although he was a romantist by nature, he had middle class attitudes. Therefore, as the first black author who tried to live by his pen, in a sense he had to turn his back on reality. He tried to face the reality; however, he could not fight it so he decided to wear a mask to hide it instead. It can be safely said, though, that in the elements of protest novel which surface occasionally in his novel, are signs of his real self.

As the title "The Uncalled" signifies, in this novel Dunbar treated metaphorically the theme of rebellion from the restriction of old mores and folk ways under religious parochialism. He used it skillfully unlike his contemporaries, not only in the development of the plot but in portraying the hero's inner struggle. It is, at the same time, a symbol for the freedom which underlied his deeper mind and it is also the model for his provincial consciousness, the so-called "plantation tradition"; that is, as Robert A. Bone pointed out, the Natural (Freddie) and the Artificial (Hester). Dunbar said that:

It is one of defects of the provincial mind that it can never see any good in a
great city. It concludes that, as many people are wicked, where large numbers of human beings are gathered together there must be a much greater amount of evil than in a smaller place.\(^8\)

In this novel, "a sense of fate" of forces beyond human control, pervades the novel:

> When Fate is fighting with all her might against a human soul, the greatest victor the soul can win is to reconcile itself to the unpleasant, which is never quite so unpleasant afterwards. Upon this principle Frederick Brent acted instinctively.\(^9\)

This very principle may be seen as the one on which Dunbar based his way of life and the dark shadow that hovered over his later years can be seen as this sense of fate.

III  *The Love of Landry*

This is the cheapest love story among his novels. Mildred Osborne, the daughter of wealthy parents, is a very weak girl whose family doctor orders her away from New York in order to help her recover her health. After a long discussion, her father decides to go Colorado. Arthur Heathcote, a young Englishman, has already proposed to her; however, she can't accept his proposal because she thinks that she can't give him what he wants and deserves, and moreover, she is looking for another type of romantic love. At Mr. Hendrickson's farm in Denver, Mildred meets young fellow named Landry. She often has chances to meet and talk with him and gradually gets to know him quite well through walking and horse back riding. As the days pass she becomes full of gaiety and good health. Meanwhile, Mr. Osbone, who is aware of the growing intimacy between them makes an attempt to check it. In spite of this, their relationship deepens. Mrs. Annesley, a distant aunt with whom Mildred corresponds, also realizes the extent of Mildred's feelings and warns her about her relationship with Landry.

One day Arther Heathcote visits to propose her again, however, she isn't glad to see him. On the other hand, since his arrival Landry feels as if Mildred is estranged from him and that she is using him. Heathcote realizes Landry's situation and they become friends. One day Landry confesses his love and proposes to Mildred. Although Mildred knew that day was coming, she is shocked and refuses his proposal. Landry terribly distressed and tells her about his past in a letter. According to his letter he was once the son of a wealthy family and went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology after the death of his parents. His elder brother married and then became estranged to Landry and was his brother's wife stole Landry's estate. When his brother died only five thousand dollars was left. With the money Landry left the city and became a farm hand. When Mildred's father, who also refused Landry's proposal, reads his leeter, he accepts him. One day when everyone goes out for a cattle round-up, Mildred, whose pony's foot is caught in a deep praire dog hole, is nearly stampeded by the herd. With a narrow escape, Landry save her, and as a result, their ties strengthen.

This is really a love story. The plot is contrived with a melodramatic ending on a plantation theme. Mildred loses her health in the city, that is:
... civilization has always been a foe to good health. When our ancestors themselves, and danced in impossible things on the sand, who ever heard of weak lungs? But now, after a season of tripping it in a close room in heavy silk, my lady has a cough.\(^{(10)}\)

However, when she comes to Colorado, she recovers her health:

A whole week passed, a happy week, full of the joy of out-door life for Mildred. She saw herself acquiring both gaiety and health, the reward one gains by living near to Nature's heart. She was not yet done babbling of the pleasure the concert had given her, and her father went on, smiling, happy too, and unseeing.\(^{(11)}\)

On the other hand, Landry, whose name is a symbol of land and of earth, thinks:

No, some of us come to get breathing space, when we are stifled back there by meanness and deceit. Some of us come here to look at the great mountains and broad plains, and forget how little man is; to see Nature, and, through it, Nature's God, and so get back to faith.\(^{(12)}\)

In his letter to Mildred, Landry as "natural man," mentions his brother's suicide as follows:

That is why I hate civilisation, and you are the first one who has ever called me back to it. Do not judge my brother too harshly; he was not so much to blame as the devilish, deceitful, strenuous civilization that drove him to his death.\(^{(13)}\)

Mildred lost her health in New York and Landry also had a bitter life in the city. But they gain freedom and happiness in Colorado. In this novel, his attitude shows that the civilization of the city is evil and that life in the country is a source of happiness. Robert Farnsworth said about the novel that:

Dunbar's last novel\(^{(14)}\) The Love of Landry is white and sentimental. It adds nothing to his stature as a black writer. Dunbar's power and position were waning and the novel was a weak effort to achieve a popular gentility.\(^{(15)}\)

Robert A. Bone criticizes it severely:

The Love of Landry (1900) is by far the worst of Dunbar's novels. It hinges on the romantic separation of two lovers by a class barrier, resulting from the fact — so unpalatable to Victorian sensibilities — that the hero works with his hands... "What does [civilization] mean after all, except to lie gracefully, to cheat legally, and to live as far away from God and Nature as the world will let? "Landry's romantic retreat from civilization to his ranch in Colorado has its parallel in Dunbar's spiritual retreat
from the conditions of modern life to the old plantation.\(^{(16)}\)

The novel was attacked on every side and Vernon Loggins mentioned that:

\[\ldots\] in 1900 Dunbar published a second novel in which all of the characters are whites, *The Love of Landry*. It is a story of Easterners, all treacly sentimentalists, who think that they find the sublime beauty of reality on a Colorado ranch. It was, if that is possible, even a poorer performance than *The Uncalled*. However, in the career of Dunbar *The Love of Landry* has a peculiar interest, in that the idea of the story was suggested to him while he was in the mountains of Colorado fighting the first stages of the disease, tuberculosis, which was after a struggle of more than five years to claim him.\(^{(18)}\)

As Vernon Loggins points out, Dunbar’s physical illness can be seen reflected in this novel. In addition, the psychological conflict resulting from marital problems also seems apparent in the relationship of Landry and Mildred. Moreover, it is clear that this novel is far more shallow in the characterization and poorer in the development of plot than *The Uncalled*.

**IV The Fanatics**

*The Fanatics* is the story of the Van Dorens, the Waters, the Stewarts, and the Woods who live in the small town of Dorbury, Ohio. Stephen Van Doren, Bradford Waters, and Nathan Woods are mutual friends; however, the outbreak of the Civil War breaks down their relationships. Especially, Stephan, staunch Democrat, and Bradford Waters staunch a Republican, quarrel with one another over the war. Robert Van Doren loves Mary Waters and Tom Waters loves Nannie Woods, but because the friendship between their parents has soured, the relationship between Robert and Tom and the love between Robert and Mary Waters are blocked. In a rage, Robert joins the Confederacy and Tom joins the Union Army. Robert’s friend Walter also joins the North. The war disturbs their peace and at the same time imposes painful situation on them. Mary, whose lovers joins the Confederacy, has a quarrel with her father Bradford about the problem and leaves home to live in Nannie’s house. She then encounters the scorn of the supporters of the North in the town and ends up having a nervous breakdown. Her father, however, does not even come to see her and her mental condition becomes worse.

Walter Stewart, who belonged to the Union Army, deserts the Army to see his father on his death bed in Virginia. On the way home he is mistaken for Nelson Etheridge who is under heavy guard, and arrested by the soldiers of the Confederacy. Fortunately, because his father was a Colonel in the South, at an officer’s discretion he is allowed to see his father. Old Colonel Stewart serves the Confederate cause while Nelson Etheridge flings himself body and soul into the Union cause. Both men exchange visits and Walter Stewart, who feels he is playing a double role, and Dolly Etheridge fall in love. Confederate Lieutenant Forsythe loves Dolly, however, and on the pretext of duty he goes to Dolly’s house and sets a trap to seduce her. Fortunately, Walter happens to be near her house and help her evade him. He then challenges Lieutenant Forsythe to fight duel. Just as they are about to duel, a squad of horsemen in grey uniform burst into the enclosure.
Walter and the lieutenant are arrested. With the help of Dr. Daniel and a letter from Dolly in which the truth of their affair is revealed, Walter is released and the wicked act of the lieutenant is disclosed to Colonel Braxton.

Mary Walters, who has regained her strength, remains in the Woods’s house, but she cannot sleep because a vision of a Black Rider haunts her day and night. One night she creeps away from her bed and takes a train to Avondale, Cincinnati. In spite of the terror of the unknown, of the darkness, of the mystery in her wild act she can neither stop nor turn back. At last, having arrived in a little village, she stops under a huge oak tree. Suddenly, she hears the sound of hoof-beats and sees the figure of that Black Rider, crying “Robert, Robert.” After seeing Robert and engaging in conversation under these mysterious circumstances, she loses consciousness. People who heard the sound of hoof-beats and have been aroused gather by torch light, so Robert says “God be with you” and leaves with that. She buries this strange affair deep in her mind and with the help of a villager, recovers sufficiently to get back to the Woods’ house. When the Woods ask why she had to leave during the night, she only says with smile “I had to go away.”

Meanwhile, Tom Waters, who has been performing remarkable military achievements on the field and has become a public hero in Dorbury, is killed in battle at Mission Ridge. As the sad news spreads all over the town Stephen Van Doren goes to condole Bradford on the death of his son, thus helping them to reestablish their relationship. After Van Doren leaves, Bradford sends his servant to Nathan Woods’ house to bring his daughter Mary home.

After meeting Mary Robert is seriously wound and is helped by John Metzinger and his good wife Gretchen. In spite of Robert being a Confederate soldier, the Metzingers nurse him until he regains his strength. With the help of these kind Germans, he recovers even though he loses an arm. On his way home he sees Mary in front of her house and as they are reaffirming their love for one another Bradford Waters comes back. They are troubled and embarrassed, but Bradford receives Robert warmly, much to their surprise. Robert then goes back home with Mary and Van Doren is deeply moved by their reunion. The town’s people who have gotten a news about Robert, gather around Van Doren’s house shouting, “There he is — Reble’s too good for him — copperhead’s the name!” and “Traitor.” Van Doren tries to protect Mary and Robert. As he levels his pistol at a man in the foremost ranks of the crowd. A rock hurles past his head and crashes through a window. The mob cries “Come on, rock them.” At the crucial moment, Bradford Waters comes up to the house and protects them. After the war, Dorbury has its share of joy and grief receiving home-coming soldiers, worn and weary with the long campaign. In the midst of such developments Robert and Mary marry and just about the time of their marriage, Walter Stewart and Dolly are united.

The main plot itself is fairly well development; however, in chapter “Black Rider”, it loses probability because of the improbable vision of the Black Rider. Also, the scene of “A Vague Quest”, in which Mary meets Robert at the unknown place in Cincinnati, is much too contrived. Vernon Loggins says that:

Dunbar’s third novel, The Fanatics (1901), is a more successful treatment of white types. While it is a romance of the Civil War, emphasis is not on battle scenes, but on how the struggle affects a small Ohio town which is made up of sympathizers for
the South as well as for the North. There is exciting narrative from the beginning. However, interest does not become strong until the "contrabands" come pouring in from across the Ohio River with their queer songs and delightful dialect. Yet entirely too little is made of them. With the exception of a minor character, who provides an interesting climax for the ending of the tale, the Negro appears for no more than atmosphere.\(^{(19)}\)

Loggins gave fairly favorable criticism of this work; although, as he points out, "the negro appears for no more than atmosphere." Worse still, Dunbar drops his mask in treating Nigger Ed:

And it was true. There were men who had seen that black man on bloody fields, which were thick with the wounded and dying, and these could not speak of him without tears in their eyes. These were women who begged him to come in and talk to them about their sons who had been left on some Southern field, wives who wanted to hear over again the last words of their loved ones. And so they gave him a place for life and everything he wanted, and from being despised he was much petted and spoiled, for they were all fanatics.\(^{(20)}\)

Nigger Ed appears often in this novel, however, he has no any important role in the development of the plot. Ed is more or less the stereotype of the "Old Negro", which Alain Locke pointed out in his "the New Negro": "the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being a something to be argued about, condemned or defenced, to be 'kept down', or 'in this place,' or 'helped up,' to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden."\(^{(21)}\)

In another scene, Dunbar skillfully and effectively creates tension through his treatment of the contrabands. In the scene before the contrabands were attacked by Stothard and his Confederates, Dunbar used Stephan Van Doren to help the contrabands slip through the hands of Stothard:

In all the town, they had no stronger friend than Stephan Van Doren. A Southerner by birth and education, he understood these people, who had for two centuries been the particular wards of the South. While he had no faith in the ultimate success of the Union arms, and believed that all these blacks must eventually go back into shavery whence they had come, yet he reasoned that they were there, and such being the case, all that was possible, ought to be done for them.\(^{(22)}\)

Van Doren's attitude toward blacks is as follow:

"Whatever I may be, I'm not a conspirator." Stothard blanched at the word. "Nor," went on the old man, "am I a barroom orator and leader of ruffians. Come, boys," he said addressing the negroes, and they grinned broadly and hopefully at the familiar conduct and manner of address of the South which they knew and loved.\(^{(23)}\)
On the other hand, Dunbar characterized Waters as constrastive: "the old New England fanaticism, the Puritanical intolerance, was strong in the man." (24) According to Robert A. Bone, "the is corrupted in advance. Pandering to the prejudices of his white audience in order to gain hearing, Dunbar resorts to caricature in his treatment of minor Negro characters." (25) Thus, as a result, even when he is forced to face the problem, he treats it ambiguously:

The poor blacks, wandering in the darkness of their ignorance were as frightened children in the night. They had lost faith their masters, but it was not lost to them entire, only transferred to these new beings, who mastered them by the power of love. (26)

V. The Sport of the Gods

Berry Hamilton and his wife Fannie, ex-slave who were owned by the Oakleys for twenty years, are presently employed by the Oakleys as butler and housekeeper. They live in the yard some hundred paces from the Oakley mansion with their son, Joe, and their daughter, Kitty. Mr. and Mrs. Oakley, on the other hand, have no children so they dote on Oakley's younger brother, Francis. Francis, a budding artist who lived in Paris for five years is about to return to Paris after a two-month visit to Oakley's house.

On the night of a farewell dinner party held for him by the Oakleys, Francis happens to go back to his room and find his money missing. Suspicion is cast upon Berry because Berry was the last man Francis met in his room that day. Late that night a detective comes to examine the room and the next morning, Francis, with financial aid from Mr. Oakley, returns to Paris. Meanwhile, Berry Hamilton is arrested on the charge of theft because he has a considerable amount of money which, in reality, he and his wife have saved from their small salary over a long time. Fannie asks the help of Mr. and Mrs. Oakley, but in vain. Without a thorough investigation into the matter Berry is given ten years hard labor and Maurice Oakley mercilessly tells the Hamilton family, "you can't stay here any longer. I want none of your breed about me." Joe, who has the necessary qualifications to become a barber goes out searching for work and Fannie, seeking a house. Unfortunately, however, they are able to obtain neither employment nor housing because they have become outcastes in their town. So they decide to go to New York to start a new life. Fannie and her daughter, Kitty, leave feeling as if their hearts were left behind; Joe, on the other hand, does not even look back at the place which he has come to hate.

In New York they fall into degregation. Joe indulges himself in pleasures, just as his mother feared he would. He meets Hattie Stering, a stage dancer at Banner Club and from that time he falls "head over heels" in love with her. One day Joe is visited by Minty Brown from his home town. Minty reveals Joe's family's past to all his friends, destroying his hope and driving him to desperation. On the other hand, Kitty becomes a member of a stage chorus through Hattie's introduction.

A year after Berry Hamilton's arrest Mr. Oakley receives a letter from his brother, Francis. In the letter Francis confesses that during his stay in America he gambled to make more money; however, luck was against him. He lied to Mr. Oakley about his money being stolen. He also begs Mr. Oakley to reveal the facts and to have Berry released. Upon reading the letter Mr. Oakley
falls to the floor fainting, and that day on the Oakleys become recluses.

Five years later Joe is still leading the same purposeless life of a loafer. Hattie sometimes encourages him and sometimes casts him aside. Finally, she casts him off for good. At first he runs away like a beaten dog; however, he returns again and kills her repeating, "You put me out tonight, like a dog." Mr. Skaggs, a friend of Joe at the Banner Club and reporter on a yellow journal, becomes interested in Joe's case and he goes to the South to gather information about it. By pretending to be Francis's friend, he succeeds in entering Mr. Oakley's house. Mr. Oakley is led, by Skaggs' pointed questions, to confesses the truth of Hamilton's case. Having succeeded in getting big news for his newspaper and good news for Hamilton, for he goes to the state capital where he succeeds in obtaining a release for the innocent Berry Hamilton. He then gets Berry to go to New York where he is met with sad news, that is, his son Joe has been arrested on the charge of murder, and his wife Fannie has already remarried to Mr. Gibson, a gambler; and his daughter is on the road as a member of stage chorus. Berry goes to Gibson's house to seek revenge; however, fortunately, Gibson was killed in a fight at a race truck. Berry cries "Thank God! Thank God! This man's blood is not on my hands." As Mr. Gibson is dead and there are no obstacles to their reunion, Berry and Fannie leave New York for their home town. When Mrs. Oakley hears of their return, she re-opens and refurnishes the little cottage in the yard for them.

VI The Theme of The Sport of the Gods

Criticism of this novel is divided into two camps. One camp maintains that "the novel reiterates the plantation-school thesis that the Negro becomes demoralized in the urban North" (27), as Rober A. Bone points out; and the other is that "The Sport of the Gods... ended Dunbar's major work as a social critic" (28). To resolve this dispute a detailed examination of the novel is necessary. The novel opens with the following passage:

Fiction has said so much in regret of the old days when there were plantation and overseers masters and slaves, that it was good to come upon such a household as Berry Hamilton's, if for no other reason than that it afforded a relief from the monotony of tiresome iteration. (30)

In a general sense, at least, the opening lines are very important as they suggest the direction of the novel. The opening words here seem to suggest the plantation thesis, and there is a lot of evidence in the novel to support this view. Especially, in the seventh chapter, "In New York", the novel's true character is gradually revealed.

So he [Joe] had started out with false ideals at to what was fine and manly. He was afflicted by a sort of moral and mental astigmatism that made him see everything wrong. (31)

For the Hamilton, New York is an evil that devastates them. Especially, young Joe, who desired
city life, is overshadowed by evil:

Whom the Gods wish to destroy they first make mad. The first sign of the demoralization of the provincial who comes to New York is his pride at his insensibility to certain impressions which used to influence him at home. First, he begins to scoff, and there is no truth in his views nor depth in his laugh. But by and by, from mere pretending, it becomes real. He grows callous. After that he goes to the devil very cheerfully.\(^{(32)}\)

Even Fannie is influenced by the evil and loses her power to fight it. The following passages show the process of her desensitization:

Mrs. Hamilton could not understand it all, and many a night she wept and prayed over the change in this child of her heart. There were times when she felt that there was nothing left to work or fight for. The letters from Berry in prison became fewer and fewer. He was sinking into the dull, dead routine of his life. Her own letters to him fell off.\(^{(33)}\)

In the fifteenth chapter, "Dear, Damned, Delightful Town," Dunbar's ulterior motives are revealed through Sadness, who is "perhaps the first embodiment of the spirit of the blues which appeared in Negro Literature."\(^{(34)}\)

Here is another example of the pernicious influence of the city on untrained Negroes. Oh, is there no way to keep these people from rushing away from the small villages and country districts of the South up to the cities, where they cannot battle with the terrible force of a strange and unusual environment? Is there no way to prove to them that woolen-shirted, brown-jeaned simplicity is infinitely better than broadclothed degradation? They wanted to preach to these people that good agriculture is better than bad art, that it was better and nobler for them to sing to God across the Southern field than to dance for rowdies in the Northern halls. They wanted to dare to say that the South has its faults — on one condones them — and its disadvantages, but that even what they suffered from these was better than what awaited them in the great alleys of New York.\(^{(35)}\)

As a conclusion of his theme, Dunbar states that:

... there was no way ... the stream of young Negro life would continue to flow up from the South, dashing itself against the hard necessities of the city and breaking like waves against a rock, that, until the gods grew tired of their cruel sport, there must still be sacrifices to false ideals and unreal ambition.\(^{(36)}\)

Ultimately, for Dunbar, the cityward is a "false ideals and unreal ambition" for blacks. There is
no question about his intention in this novel, and judging from previous citations, it may be said that The Sport of the Gods is a social critique although it obviously treats the plantation-school theme. He presents a simplistic resolution which, nevertheless, is adequate for the theme:

Leslie Oakley heard of their coming, and with her own hands re-opened and refurnished the little cottage in the yard for them. There the white-haired woman begged them to spend the rest of their days and be in peace and comfort.

It was not a happy life, but it was all that was left to them, and they took it up without complaint, for they knew they were powerless against some Will infinitely stronger than their own.37

Stering Brown has given strict but warm criticism of this novel: “the book has serious weakness, but it gives promise that Dunbar for his untimely death, might have become a prose writer of power judged by his accomplishment, however, Dunbar in fiction must be considered as one who followed the leader, not as blazer of new trials. It is worth paying a serious attention.”38

VII His Spiritual Locus

As Robert A. Bone points out, Dunbar was “the first Negro author in America who tried seriously to earn a living from his writings.”39 Of course he was confronted with some limitations imposed on him from society. First of all, he was a black, so given the social conditions at that time, it was inevitable, as mentioned before, that Dunbar himself had to make a tremendous effort to publish his first poetry, including financing the book and selling it himself. Sterling Brown points out in his “The Negro Author and His Publisher” that “Dunbar in his tragically brief life-span had to get money (little enough at that) by writing for the Broadway musical comedy bargain counter, by working at the Library of Congress, and by occasional patronage. . . . But the Negro must also work within the present publishing framework. If prejudice does exist, denying complete and honest treatment of Negro life and character, and of course it does, the individual Negro writer must act as far as possible as if the prejudice did not exist. He cannot afford to fall into what is so often the bane of Negro achievement, i.e., self pity: ‘the if only I had been white,’ the ‘ain’t it hard to be an Ethiopian,’ ‘the world’s against me because I am a Negro.’”40 For his life or income, on the vagaries of the market, he was not overly disposed to challenge the prejudices of his white audience.”41

In Dunbar’s novels there are two aspects — the shadow and the light. The shadow — or negro life from the white perspective — is embodied in the characters of Freddie in The Uncalled, Landry and the Negro in the train of The Love of Landry, and Nigger Ed in The Fanatics and the light — or the real life of blacks — is embodied in the inner world of Freddie and his father, and the life of the Hamiltons. The shadow and the light complement other. If only the light had been presented The Fanatics and The Sport of the Gods it could be considered “protest novels . . . the black man speaking of his condition in America.”42 For the most part, Dunbar’s real self is concealed and suppressed, and when it is expressed here and there it is depicted subtly.

Dunbar was a novelist who was swayed between protest and accommodationism. Jay Martin
said that "there was much bitterness in Paul which he had to suppress, Mrs. Nelson said more than once . . ." (43) From London he wrote to a friend in 1897, "I see now very clearly that Mr. Howells has done me irrevocable harm in the dictum he laid down regarding my dialect verse." (44) He always had something or other that was suppressed in his mind. It has been said that this suppressive tendency engendered his ambiguous attitude.

Another criticism of his novels is that the plantation theme is difficult to understand. Why must Freddie feel inability in a city? Why is the Hamilton's family demoralized in a city? Is Dunbar too much of a romanticist and why has he the anti-industrial bias of the plantation tradition? It is very difficult to find the answer only by looking his novels. There is a key to solving this problem in his poems:

The plain ol' homelike sorter folks
Is good enough fur me

........
They overdo the thing.
That's jest the thing that makes me sick,
An' quicker 'n a wink
I set it down that them same folks.
Ain't half so good's you think.

........

I like the honest tan
That lies upon the heathful cheek
An' speeks the honest man;
I like to grasp the brawny hand,
That labor' lips have kissed,
For he who has not labored here
Life's greatest pride has missed. (45)

His attitude towards to life can be seen in this poem and a number of his other poems celebrate nature or life. The earth mother inspires his attitude towards to life. His desire to return to nature can be seen in the Tuskegee Institute school song which Booker T. Washington requested that Dunbar write in 1902: The field smile to greet us, the forests are glad,/ The ring of the anvil and hoe/Have a music as thrilling and sweet as a harp/Which thou taught us to hear and to know. (46)

This desire to return to nature seems to have close connection with his birth place, Dayton, Ohio, a place of natural beauty. Moreover, his characters (shyness and sensitivity) seem to promote the love towards nature and, at least, these kind of characters have its tendency. In his "Death Song" he completely returns to nature:

Lay me down beneath de willers in de grass,
Whah de branch'll go a - singin' as it pass.
An' w'en I's a-layin' low,
I kin hyeah it as it go
Singin', "Sleep, my honey, tek yo' res' at las'.'"

Lay me night to whah hit meks a little pool,
An' de watah stan's so quiet lak an' cool,
Whah de little birds in spring,
Ust to come an' drink an' sing,
An' de chillen waded on dey way to school.(47)

On the afternoon of February 12th at A.M.E. Church in Dayton, many flowers wer sent and eloquent tributes paid to Dunbar. Among them was a letter from Brand Whitlock, Mayor of Toledo, which was read by Dr. Tobey:

... Nature, who knows so much better than man about everything, cares nothing at all for the little distinctions, and when she elects one of her children for her most important work, bestows on him the rich gift of poesy, and assigns him a post in the greatest of the arts, she invariably seizes the opportunity to show her contempt of rank and title and race and land on creed. She took Burns from a plow and Paul from an elevator, and Paul has done for his own people what Burns did for the peasants of Scotland ... But the terms on which Nature lets her darlings become poets are alway obdurate ... There was nothing foreign in Paul's poetry, nothing imported, nothing imitated: it was all original, native and indigenous. Thus he becomes the poet not of his own race alone — I wish I could make people see this — but the poet of you and of me and all men everywhere.(48)

For Dunbar, "Nature" means something like god, and when Dunbar returns to nature, he is returning to god.

There are many structural shortcomings in Dunbar's literary technique, and as Vernon Loggins pointed out, his "style is nervous and unseen, typical of that which one might expect from the mind of a man who is suffering from tuberculosis."(49) A year after the publication of The Uncalled, his tuberculosis was detected. Perhaps because of his poor health he lost control over the novel's development and the struggle of its main characters. As a result, the novel degenerated into a mere love romance. In 1902 when Dunbar wrote The Sport of the Gods, in addition to being in poor physical condition he was suffering psychologically because of separation from Alice Dunbar. A letter dated July 27, 1902 to one of his friends reveals his mental condition: "You will be seriously shocked to hear that Mrs. Dunbar and I are now living apart, and the beautiful home I had at Washington is a thing of the past ... I am greatly discouraged and if I could do anything else, I should give up writing. Something within me seems to be dead. There is no spirit or energy left in me. My upper lip has taken on a droop."(50) The influence of Dunbar's emotional state on his writing is clear in the unbalanced development of The Sport of the Gods: the scene of Oakley's house develops rather slowly while the sequence of the degradation of the Hamilton family in New York develops to fast. He then hurriedly rushes to the denouncement or
resolution. As a result, the main character’s conflicts become weak and the novel lacking in credibility.

Vernon Loggins pointed out that “story itself more than once shows a naturalistic view of life.” (51) Hugh M. Gloster admits that “though amateurish in execution, The Sport of the Gods is Dunbar’s worthiest effort in fiction and suggests abilities which possibly did not achieve fruition because of author’s early death. Written under the influence of naturalism, which Parrington defines as ‘pessimistic realism,’ The Sport of the Gods follows Emile Zola’s Nana (1880), Stephen Crane’s Maggie . . .” (52)

Paul Laurence Dunbar became the first black author to be mentioned in the main stream of American literature. His untimely death was a loss for American literature and black literature as well. He established a foothold for black literature before the period of the Harlem Renaissance and in his short life he left a lot of poems, short stories and fiction. His accomplishments were great; however, he is one of the authors who swayed between protest and accommodationism and his views reflect “the limited knowledge of many historians, economists and social philosophers of his day.” (53) Dunbar was a tragic poet interpreting his own people through songs, stories and novels under the pressure of a various obstacles and burdens.
NOTES


2) Among his classmates there were Wilbur (1867 — 1912) and Orville Wright (1871 — 1948), who later invented the airplane.

3) He was a novelist and critic, and had a important role in American history and literature as editor. He was a friend of Mark Twain and Henry James and a most influential person in the literary world at his time. He wrote about Dunbar in the introduction of *Lyrics of Lowly Life* as follows:

   . . . . So far as I could remember, Paul Dunbar was the only man of pure African blood and of American civilization to feel the negro life aesthetically and express it lyrically. It seemed to me that this had come to its most modern consciousness in him, and that his brilliant and unique achievement was to have studied the American negro objectively, and to have represented him as he found him to be, with humor, with sympathy, and yet with what the reader must instinctively feel to be entire truthfulness . . . .


10) Dunbar, *ibid.*, p. 3.


14) "Dunbar's last novel" means the last novel which Robert Farnsworth treated in his essay "Testing the Color Line — Dunbar and Chesnut."


